

## 22 ♦ Poetry

**Need we run against the wind**

Ryan Woods

Need we run against the wind  
And scream until our lungs are hoarse  
To sleep at night?  
Or can we not abide within the warm-drawn sphere  
Wherein our friends are exchanging joy and laughter  
To pass the time in peaceful contemplation?  
The world does not slide toward hell;  
This is an hour, indeed, of peace; the gears  
Of war do not turn at rocket-speed to crush us  
In their untimely, inevitable rotation.  
We are free to live as free children of the daytime  
And rest our play-worn tired-out souls at night  
With light and heavy, soul-strung music  
And art that speaks the language of emotion  
When young lovers meet and share their joy  
In each other's presence; and friends  
Commit each other's humor to memory within the living room,  
Singing, playing piano and board games fraught with competition,  
And eating together with the families we love.  
Why must fear come down from above and crush  
Our peaceful, playful souls in an iron fist  
And subject us to the sweatshop?  
Why must resource be just beyond arm's length  
Smoking in disintegration? To one's own dismay  
We see our youth burnt up as a cigarette  
And tossed aside amid the boxes, grease, and wrappings  
That fill the dumpster in the back,  
As terror and worry turn our eyes to black in the night  
When tears rain down upon our pillows  
And the comfort that is meant within that case  
Is turned to stones, among which our heads are pressed  
And held in great discomfort unto the day  
In which we wake and live out our disturbed sleep  
Shaking loose the stillness of others' lives  
And invariably, unstopably tearing apart our own  
Minds into fragmentary swathes of shredded paper

As an essay consumed by a lawn mower  
And spat back upon the earth as meaningless litter.  
Why must we see ourselves so spent as a minimum wage  
Shift for half a tank of gas, slipping, spilling  
The contents of our ambrosial minds onto the hot summer pavement  
Where it mixes in with chewed-up gum and mangled straw wrappers,  
The dirt of shoes and spilled drinks and the drips of sweat  
On summer days so hot that this puddle itself evaporates  
And leaves but a noxious crust upon the ground;  
This is no pretty marble stone, no design here -  
Just the upchuck of a mangled frame done in by cigarettes and fast food  
So that even a walk in the park becomes homework  
Despised and cried out against as hot oil splashed on one's hands.  
Nature becomes our enemy, wearing us down as man  
Wears us out - rags upon a food preparation table  
Wiped and wiped and wiped until brown and thin,  
Then tossed aside that a new one might come and  
Begin again the wiping, wiping, wiping of the grease that's left,  
Like an unwanted child, behind as the rest plunges down  
The esophagus into the swirling sieve that is the stomach,  
Choking veins of lifeblood and exiting in that infernal oven  
Of excrement: the porta pot wherein lies our day's labor  
After the few moments of apparently meaningful consumption  
That lends us no lasting rejuvenation but  
A slowing of our feet.  
We fill, we empty, and we clean the vomit of our days,  
(And, oh, the smell that clings upon our clothes  
And will not wash away!)

And, all the while, we ask why? and  
What is this?  
What is this mop that picks us up and drags us naked  
Across the filth-paved tile?  
We are told, indeed, that herein lies the key to our future,  
That day-in and day-out our toil will produce joy,  
That our paycheck is our heaven, the pearly gates wherein our boss allows us entry.  
But here, around us, in front of us, back home

Are our friends, our family, the beautiful world  
That lies outstretched before us as a vast terrain for exploration,  
And people for our mutual joy and inspiration.  
Art is not born of a distracted mind;  
At least the subconscious works unwittingly behind  
The shouting world of advertisements,  
Flashy, flashing, flasher-tisements  
Ever-shouting, singing, talking talking talking  
Before our minds, to pull us away  
And chop us up  
From that pure, uninterrupted stream wherein  
Flow the waters of life and the beautiful nymphs that inspire us  
Unto heavenly realms and let us know for what  
We tread this shadowed valley  
Unto death (where ends our employment).  
Indeed, I do not see God in the machine,  
But, here, at home, among family and friends,  
In love, and peace, and quietness,  
And music, art, and reflection,  
Reminiscence, and the pondering of the future.  
Indeed, I see inscribed on my tombstone not  
“Here lies the unemployed”  
But  
“Here lies the child of joy”  
Who did not misuse the gifts he was given  
To beat and beat and beat the walls,  
To build an estate, then sell it and move away,  
To build a skyscraper and tear it down  
Without a moment’s thought.  
Slow down and smell the flowers; nay,  
Stop and lie among them.  
There are times  
And times and times  
To turn the crank of a broken cable.  
Take a break, and break the monotony;  
Even the robots fall apart - there is no perfect mechanism.

Look around you, and see,  
Reflected in the masks you once saw, the  
Faces of those you love. Then,  
Daily, every hour, unstitch them  
To slowly unveil the lovely faces  
And glittering eyes and smiles beneath.  
Take some time - no, let it take you  
Away on a vessel to some distant land across the sea  
Where our lives are not measured by computerized "clocking-in" and "clocking-out,"  
And our souls are not left behind in a box on a closet shelf.  
The conveyor belt can pull you into eternity,  
But at the edge you fall -  
Dear gravity does not spare any commodity this law -  
And not into heaven.  
Take some time away from work to run the fields of life.  
You do not only live once,  
Unless you deny your second life.  
Heaven is not built with strip malls,  
Nor hell with loving friendship.  
Despise not work, but free it from its unnatural ethic  
And yoke of eternal efficiency.  
What is its end? - If not man  
Then crush its infernal machinery!  
Keep in mind the ends of labor and  
Go for some classical music in the park.  
You know the grave awaits your body and it is  
Not built with endless labor.  
Reputation is not your paradise;  
Knowledge is our sage. High marks do not  
A life define; nor ever let them rule it.  
Peace unto the static soul;  
Turn the dial to a new station from which flows  
Music that sounds the language of serenity.  
Sometimes our own predicament resembles that dread symbol  
Of the snake devouring its own tail.  
Sometimes the heavy boots of day do lethally tread upon a snail.

Take them off; take them off,  
And perhaps we can weave a new tale.  
The old was starvation, war, and disease;  
Perhaps today it is the loss of peace-of-mind.  
Let us strive to live as organic men,  
Trees that grow, even amid the city.